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Office of the Mayor/City Council
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Monorail Review Panel

Integrating the Monorail through
Design & Planning

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Mayor

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Re: **Monorail Review Panel Preliminary Analysis and Recommendations
regarding the Proposed Alignment and Station Locations**

Dear Mayor Nickels and All Councilmembers:

The Monorail Review Panel (MRP), a subcommittee of the Seattle Design Commission, is pleased to provide you with our preliminary analysis and recommendations regarding the Seattle Monorail Project's (SMP's) *Preliminary Staff Recommendation for Alignment and Stations* dated November 18, 2003 ("Preliminary Staff Recommendation"). The MRP has devoted many hours to this effort and we appreciate your patience and willingness to allow us ample opportunity to prepare this analysis. We hope that you find this information useful as you proceed with the alignment decision-making process and the Transitway Agreement in the coming months.

The MRP is comprised of twelve members: five Design Commissioners, four Design Review Board members, and three Planning Commissioners. The MRP was created to provide independent, peer-level professional review of the Monorail project on planning and urban design elements to comply with the code required mandate of the Design Commission. In forming the recommendations contained in the attached report, the MRP carefully reviewed the SMP Staff Recommendation, attended SMP community meetings, conducted a day-long workshop on November 22nd, and engaged in countless hours of individual research and analysis. The MRP's perceptions were also informed through review of four conceptual station designs located in the Interbay and Ballard segments. The MRP has engaged in a lively and healthy debate regarding the Preliminary Staff Recommendations and has not been in complete agreement on all of the issues. The MRP strongly believes, however, that the Green Line must be designed to be part of an integrated transportation system and to be a catalyst for neighborhood development that furthers the goals and policies of the City's Comprehensive Plan and various neighborhood plans. The design must also be of a quality that makes it an asset to the pedestrians and neighborhoods it serves. Its sheer size and form make this transportation infrastructure difficult to integrate into the fine-grained urban setting of the Green Line corridor.

Because the environmental process is not complete and the design for many critical components of the system is at a very conceptual stage, it has been difficult to draw conclusions on every aspect of the Preliminary Staff Recommendation. Additionally, the MRP is being asked to make many design review recommendations before alignment, site boundaries, bus connections and other relevant functional decisions have been made. Therefore, it should be noted that the comments contained in the attached report reflect our preliminary observations and concerns based on the information available to-date and that additional recommendations may be forthcoming as the information becomes available.

The attached report contains a segment-by-segment detailed analysis of the alignment and station locations, as well as other project elements as warranted, proceeding methodically north to south. Also included as background information on the MRP is a Monorail Review Panel Fact Sheet and Summary of MRP Work to Date. A brief summary of the attached report is included below.

SUMMARY

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. The scale and magnitude of the Monorail project is enormous. There are significant potential impacts that require thoughtful and deliberate review. The MRP acknowledges the SMP's desire to move quickly, but cautions that careful consideration of design options and impacts should not be sacrificed for the sake of schedule.
2. Given the enormity of the Monorail project, the Preliminary Staff Recommendation does a good job of presenting its recommendations regarding the alignment and station locations in an easy to read 100 page report. Although a lot of information has been provided, critical information is needed before the MRP can render a fully informed recommendation regarding alignment and station location.
3. The Monorail project presents the City with a unique opportunity to celebrate its commitment to this alternative transportation system through excellent design and careful integration into neighborhoods. These opportunities should not be squandered through short-sighted measures to cut costs.
4. The MRP concurs that the 7 guiding principles outlined on page 2 of the Preliminary Staff Recommendation should be considered in the alignment and station location process. In addition, the MRP recommends that the following principle be considered: *The system should be designed to accommodate future expansion, paying particular attention now to opportunities and constraints at the points of future connections or extensions.*
5. The Design/Build/Operate/Maintain (DBOM) contract approach has a significant potential to impact design review because of the unreasonably accelerated schedule for reviewing and completing design work. Furthermore, there is risk associated with the DBOM process through a potential loss of control after awarding the DBOM contract unless there is some continuing review to assure that quality design is carried through to completion.

GENERAL ALIGNMENT OBSERVATIONS

1. With a few notable exceptions described below, the MRP generally concurs with the Preliminary Staff Recommendation regarding alignment. Nonetheless, several questions need to be addressed before MRP can assert with confidence that the proposed alignment is consistent with SMP's own guiding principles and meets the Panel's goals of creating an integrated transportation system that will serve as a catalyst for neighborhood development.
2. While the route itself may be largely appropriate, the guideway design and alignment must be conceived of as a coherent whole recognizing that the form of the guideway will become a significant civic element. The design of a linear system with efficient and elegant engineering should not preclude adjustments at stations that reflect the unique character of the many neighborhoods through which it passes and should -- where possible -- make modifications that strengthen the urban fabric surrounding the system. However, the alignment should also not be gerrymandered to the detriment of the system as an efficient, easily understood public transportation corridor.
3. The enormous urban design implications of the system infrastructure have not been presented to the MRP at the level of detail that is necessary for us to fully understand the alignment options in their entirety. Issues include the size and design details of the switches, operation

center and other ancillary system structures. These elements will play a significant role in the system's function and appearance.

4. Integration of the Monorail project into the City's existing transportation network is critical to the Monorail's success and must be a part of early planning, including coordination with existing Metro and Community bus service, Light Rail, and the consideration of future expansion of the system.
5. The single-beam guideway raises many questions, such as the visual impacts associated with the increased number of switches, safety concerns, impact on system capacity and the ability to expand the system in the future. The MRP recommends that the City obtain additional information before approving the single-beam guideway.
6. The MRP feels that a comprehensive art plan must be developed. There is general agreement that a major emphasis of the art program should be on the guideway elements and structures, but the MRP believes that creative coordination between engineers and artists on guideway elements should leave funding for public artwork in the stations. The art fund and program must be protected throughout the DBOM process.

GENERAL STATION OBSERVATIONS

1. The MRP generally concurs with the SMP Preliminary Staff Recommendations for 15 of the 20 proposed station locations (including Howe as a future station). Questions regarding station locations remain for the following: Dravus, Stewart, Lander, Delridge and Avalon.
2. The MRP strongly advocates that sufficient land area be provided at stations to accomplish necessary pedestrian, bus and auto access; station circulation (escalators or elevators) multimodal connections; station amenity program (restrooms and seating); and other neighborhood services.
3. A station's configuration (vertical "iris", horizontal side by side, with or without mezzanine) is a key element in both the siting and design of stations, and will ultimately need to be addressed concurrent with station review, adjacent alignment, guideway, and existing development. Until that time, the MRP cannot recommend for or against the proposed configurations.

SEGMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Ballard Segment:** The MRP agrees with the Preliminary Staff Recommendation regarding alignment and station locations, believing the proposed route (west side of 15th NW) to be both appropriate and logical, as are the general station locations in terms of key intersections and blocks.
2. **Interbay Segment:** The MRP generally agrees with the Preliminary Staff Recommended alignment, however, we do not support the locations of numerous switches within the right-of-way (near the Operations Center) having excessive negative impacts (shadow, bulk, views) on the streetscape. The MRP generally does not agree with the station location at Dravus because it is poorly sited with respect to access and impacts to existing businesses. Thus far, the MRP agrees with the Mercer station location, but notes it has not been sited and designed with adequate connections to its primary ridership area of lower Queen Anne.
3. **Queen Anne/Seattle Center/Belltown Segment:** The MRP generally agrees with the Key Arena and Broad Street station locations, but did not reach consensus on a preferred alignment at the Seattle Center. The Panel is split regarding the Preliminary Staff Recommendation with five supporting a through the Center alignment, five supporting a Mercer Street alignment, one recommending the Thomas Street alignment and one undecided. Given the significant community interest on this issue, the MRP has articulated three different perspectives in the attached report.

4. **Fifth Avenue Segment:** The MRP generally agrees with the Preliminary Staff Recommended Fifth Avenue alignment and the Bell Street Station location. The MRP does not agree with the proposed Stewart Street station location, believing that it should be located as close to the corner as possible to facilitate connections to both Light Rail and Downtown's retail core.
5. **Second Avenue Segment:** The MRP agrees with the Preliminary Staff Recommended alignment and station locations, while acknowledging significant impacts to one of downtown's most important streets. The MRP is especially pleased to see the station location at Second and Yesler allowing for redevelopment of this important site.
6. **Pioneer Square/SODO Segment:** The MRP agrees with the Preliminary Staff Recommended station location for the King/Weller station, finding it to be an excellent location for a multimodal hub. The MRP agrees with the Stadium station location, but has questions about whether the station is necessary given that access to the stadiums is also possible from the King/Weller station. The MRP does not agree with the Lander Street station location due to concerns about accessibility and impacts to the existing streetscape and displacement of existing businesses.
7. **West Seattle Segment:** The MRP does not agree with the Preliminary Staff Recommended station locations for Avalon and Delridge nor the alignment connecting the two stations and continuing to the Alaska station. The MRP does agree with the staff recommended station locations at the two junctions – Alaska and Morgan -- while acknowledging that the alignment down California is not desirable.

Please see the attached report for a detailed analysis of the MRP's recommendations on the alignment and station issues, as well as segment and station-specific analyses.

CONCLUSION

We have just begun our work in reviewing this project and have requested much more information of SMP in order to fully understand the project. At the same time, we realize that the project is moving forward and that there is value in sharing with you the observations we are able to make to-date. Therefore we offer our comments to you with the caveat that it may be necessary to augment or even revise our recommendations once additional information—most critically the FEIS—is reviewed.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our recommendations with you. Please let us know if a briefing on any of the contents of this letter would be beneficial to you.

Sincerely,

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Seattle Design Commission

Steve Sheehy, Co-Chair
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